Diversity Statement: Teresa Girolamo

My career aim is to advance equity and justice, which are the only pathway to excellence in science and higher education. During my doctoral and post-doctoral training, I have continually worked to advance equity and justice in communication sciences and disorders and higher education through research, teaching and mentorship, and community engagement and service. My research, teaching and mentorship, and community engagement and service align to all eight Building on Inclusive Excellence (BIE) criteria.

Philosophy

As a transracial Black, Indigenous, and Person of Color (BIPOC) and international adoptee, I have both a personal and scientific commitment to diversity. Diversity does not depend on individuals; rather, it is a guiding principle that necessarily involves *systemic* equity, inclusion, and justice. Thus, simply increasing the number of underrepresented individuals in higher education is insufficient; the power structure itself must change. Further, I believe that the pipeline in higher education is not leaky, such that individuals fall out due to personal failings. Rather, the pipeline is *blocked*. Top-down inequities arising from systemic oppression prevent individuals of marginalized identities from achieving excellence. Second, we must appreciate diversity from an *intersectional* perspective. BIPOC often have intersecting identities (e.g., Black, queer, and neurodiverse), each associated with marginalization, and experience *multiple marginalization* (Crenshaw, 1991). To achieve equity and justice, we must appreciate and be responsive to all identities of marginalized individuals.

Research

I translate my diversity philosophy into *language research* and *Diversity Science* (i.e., examining racial and ethnic differences through systemic factors), which align to *BIE criteria (d)* experience in and commitment to integrating understanding of underrepresented populations and communities into research, *(f)* experience in and commitment to research that engages underrepresented communities, and *(h)* research interests that contribute to diversity and equal opportunity in higher education. My language research aims to understand language abilities relative to other life outcomes in autistic BIPOC individuals to determine how to best support and scaffold individual strengths. I am committed to utilizing research to empower autistic individuals and to partnering *with* communities. I developed a partnership over several years with a community organization in the Northeast to engage Black and Hispanic/Latinx autistic young adults with language impairment in research. By removing barriers to research participation, I achieved 92% retention over 4 years (Girolamo et al., 2020, under review). My long-term aim is to use knowledge of longitudinal language development to develop supports to meet individuals' self-identified language-based needs, while also ensuring my research team reflects the diversity that is integral to science.

Since moving to the University of Connecticut in July 2021, I developed an additional community partnership with Black stakeholders in eastern Connecticut seeking advocacy for minimally verbal autistic children from their community. My role as a language researcher is to engage in dialogue about language research and to develop language studies that address mutual concerns regarding language acquisition in minority communities, which in turn, may increase the advocacy base for their needs. This partnership will inform both my ongoing longitudinal work and a new line of research pertaining to *Diversity Science*. My collaborators and I are developing a novel self-report measure for self-determination that is suitable for diverse individuals varying in sociocultural norms, language and cognitive abilities, and literacy level. The aim is to explore how systemic factors, such as self-determination (which is systemic in that it involves how well an individual feels they can set and achieve goals given environmental demands that may be beyond individual control) and social determinants of health, influence outcomes in autistic individuals. As with my language research, the project team has diverse backgrounds: Asian, Black, Latinx, Middle Eastern, and white; U.S.-born and international; researchers, practitioners, parents of autistic children, neurodiverse individuals, and individuals with disabilities.

Teaching and Mentorship

My diversity philosophy manifests in my *teaching* and *mentorship*. In addition to striving for inclusive teaching as a Graduate Teaching Assistant, I developed programming to provide faculty and students with

equitable access to professional development. For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, I coordinated workshops on Specifications Grading (an approach to inclusive teaching and course design), career pathways in communication sciences and disorders, and cross-disciplinary applications of research methods. These workshops were aimed at diverse students and faculty and showcased diverse presenters (e.g., international, neurodiverse). My cumulative activities in teaching and mentorship demonstrate *BIE criteria (b)* knowledge of barriers for underrepresented students and faculty within the discipline, *(c)* experience in and commitment to teaching and mentoring underrepresented students, and *(e)* experience in and commitment to extending knowledge of opportunities and challenges in achieving scholarly success to members of an underrepresented group.

In 2017, I co-founded the Student Equity & Inclusion Workgroup at the University of Kansas (KU). As president of the Workgroup, I led the development of programming with fellow minority students to advance minority students (e.g., BIPOC, first-generation, neurodiverse, LGBTQIA+, non-traditional, veterans, international, dual language learners) in the field of communication sciences and disorders, as well as higher education (for full details, see Girolamo & Ghali, 2021). Critical to this mission was implementing both top-down and bottom-up (i.e., grassroots) initiatives in order to effect *immediate* change for minority students while working toward *long-term* solutions for minority students by changing university infrastructure. We developed strategic partnerships with university administrators and faculty while creating independent research, mentorship, and funding initiatives to remove barriers to success. This work resulted in systemic changes to university policy (e.g., creation of a discrimination reporting mechanism across the University of Kansas Medical Center and University of Kansas-Lawrence) and individual successes (e.g., institutional and external awards, fellowships, and grants). In parallel to this work, I personally mentored 16 diverse students, from high schoolers to junior doctoral students. We have collaborated on research and publications addressing topics relevant to Diversity Science, including bias in the speech-language pathology admissions (Girolamo et al., in press), inequity in peer review of manuscripts (Girolamo et al., under review), and linguistic injustice (Politzer-Ahles et al., 2016, 2020). These papers have spurred policy changes and been incorporated into graduate and faculty training at KU, the University of Washington, and the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Community Engagement and Service

My diversity philosophy also translates into *community engagement* and *service*, thus demonstrating *BIE criterion (a)*, or a commitment to engaging in service with underrepresented populations within the discipline, and *BIE criterion (g)*, or expertise and commitment to developing expertise in cross-cultural communication and collaboration. In terms of *service*, I am a member of the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee on the Council for Academic Programs in Communication Sciences and Disorders. I also represent the University of Connecticut on the Universitas 21 Autism Research Network, which is a global network aiming to advance diversity and inclusion in autism research. Through the U21 Autism Research Network, I work with and mentor autistic researchers of international backgrounds and engage in cross-cultural exchange. At the University of Kansas, I co-led the Student Equity & Inclusion Workgroup in building a partnership with a Black-led community organization serving Black youth, the SMART Career Club of the University of Missouri Extension Jackson County Council. Per the SMART Career Club's request, we created customized first-look college programming, workshops to develop CVs, college essays, and scholarship essays. This programming supported youth on their terms in achieving their post-secondary education goals (e.g., being accepted to four-year research-intensive universities of choice in the Honors Program) and resulted in an Equity in Health Award from the Black Economic Union of Kansas City. It also resulted in state legislators inviting Student Equity & Inclusion Workgroup members to consult them on higher education policy.

Across teaching, mentorship, research, and service, I have a long-standing track record of engaging with and supporting BIPOC individuals. My activities reflect my commitment to working for justice through both bottom-up initiatives to support individuals in the "here and now" and top-down initiatives to effect lasting change in organizations. As a researcher, teacher, and mentor, my aim is not to merely satisfy organizational criteria for inclusive excellence. Rather, I aim to *advance* equity and justice individually and through departmental and institutional initiatives, contributing my own expertise, lived experiences, and voice.